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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [AF](#) [NL](#)
SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/AFGHANISTAN: POSITIVE NEWS ON MARGINS
OF EUROPEAN COUNCIL MEETING

REF: GRUBB-LUCAS 10/22/07 E-MAIL

Classified By: CDA Michael Gallagher, reasons 1.4 (b, d)

11. (S) Summary: The GONL received potentially good news from France on the margins of the European Council meeting in Lisbon on October 18-19. According to Dutch officials, French President Sarkozy agreed in a meeting with Dutch PM Balkenende to deploy up to two Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLTs) to Uruzgan in August 2008. The GONL is keeping the potential French contribution under tight wraps as Sarkozy is apparently facing considerable internal pressure not to assist the Dutch. The Dutch intend to firm up details with the French this week at the NATO Defense Ministerial in Noordwijk. The GONL continues to hope that Norway will provide ground support in Uruzgan, and to work with Prague on possible contributions. The GONL is carefully reviewing a surprise offer from Georgia consisting of 200 troops and helicopter support -- given concerns about Georgian capabilities, Moscow's reaction, and Georgian NATO membership aspirations. End summary.

French Contribution Looks Promising?

12. (S) Dutch MOD Senior Advisor for Afghanistan David van Weel (please protect) said Dutch Defense Minister Middelkoop met with French Defense Minister Morin on October 18 on the margins of the European Council meeting in Lisbon. According to van Weel, Morin and van Middelkoop discussed the possibility of two French Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLTs) being deployed to Uruzgan in August 2008. Van Weel said Dutch Prime Minister Balkenende and French President Sarkozy met October 19, and Sarkozy agreed to send one or two French OMLTs in support of a Dutch extension. In a subsequent conversation with POLCOUNS, Karel van Oosterom (PM Balkenende's Senior Foreign Affairs Advisor) confirmed that Sarkozy had offered one or two OMLTs in his discussion with Balkenende. Van Oosterom stressed, however, that this was not yet a "done deal." The Dutch, he added, had the impression that Sarkozy still faced considerable opposition to this proposal at home, and would have to use his personal influence to push it through. MFA Director for Security Affairs Robert de Groot told POLCOUNS October 22 that the French MOD oppose the Dutch request, and is pushing Sarkozy to backtrack on the OMLT offer. The Dutch plan to keep the

details of the discussion "very close hold" and hope to work out "final" details with the French at the Noordwijk NATO Defense Ministerial on October 24-25.

Aide Memoire Status Report

¶3. (SBU) On October 22, Van Weel requested Post forward an aide memoire (reftel) to SECDEF on behalf of the Dutch MOD prior to the NATO Defense Ministerial. The aide memoire provides an update regarding possible partners, and notes firm commitments from the Slovaks (50 troops) and Hungarians (one OMLT). On France, the memoire notes that President Sarkozy has offered two OMLTs for Uruzgan; this offer was made to Balkenende on October 19. The Dutch and French will discuss the offer further on the margins of the ministerial. The memoire also updates progress on potential contributions from others, including Australia (an OMLT; medical personnel possibly with Singapore); Georgia (200 troops); Czech Republic (an OMLT and temporary support for the battle group -- 80 troops); Norway (150 troops for the battle group, PRT mission team, and an OMLT); Bulgaria (camp protection); and Denmark (F-16 support). The aide memoire also raises the importance of the non-combat helicopter bridging capability, and concludes with the hope that the ministerial expedites the decision making process in potential troop contributing countries.

More Work with Czechs Needed

¶4. (C) De Groot, who participated in the October 18 delegation to Prague, said prospects of a Czech contribution "look promising." Van Weel said the Dutch delegation's trip

led to several openings, including the possibility of Prague sending 100 troops in support of the Dutch as part of force protection for the company battle group. Van Weel said, however, that it was clear "more work needed to be done." MFA Deputy Task Force Uruzgan Coordinator Eric de Feijter added that the initial Czech offer "did not quite fit" into the Dutch plan, but that the Dutch would continue to work with Prague on a Czech contribution. According to van Oosterom, Balkenende did not get as much as he had hoped from the Czechs in Lisbon, but stressed that the Dutch would continue pressing.

Whoa, Georgia!

¶5. (C) De Feijter said the Dutch were completely surprised and overwhelmed by the Georgian offer of 200 troops plus helicopters as part of any Dutch extension mission. He said the Dutch have some initial hesitations regarding Georgia's capabilities, and how Georgian participation might be viewed by Moscow. De Feijter noted Dutch reservations regarding extending the NATO membership action plan (MAP) to Georgia at next year's summit in Bucharest. He emphasized that "no deal" had been struck with Tbilisi in that regard. Instead, the Dutch will thank Georgian President Saakashvili for his generous offer and promise a thorough review of how best to use it. Given USG experience with Georgia, de Feijter said the GONL will likely approach us through military channels for a "frank and honest" assessment of Georgian capabilities. De Groot questioned what the Dutch would get -- Russian or U.S. trained Georgian troops? He suggested that the Georgians could help "fill some gaps," but ultimately doubted they could fill one of the seven modules.

What about Norway?

¶6. (S) According to van Oosterom, the Dutch have not yet given up on the Norway, but recognize that coalition dynamics in Oslo are a complicating factor. Since PM Balkenende's direct approach to Norwegian PM Stoltenberg failed to produce any additional troops, the Dutch are hoping an approach from Minister of Development (Labor Party) Koenders to his

(Socialist Left) counterpart might convince the Norwegians to commit resources to a "development" goal -- e.g., a PRT. De Groot described an on-the-ground Norwegian contribution as "critical," and that the Dutch would keep pushing Oslo -- especially as a French-Norwegian combined contribution would virtually assure the Dutch extend in Uruzgan.

Mixed Signals From Sofia

17. (C) De Groot confirmed that Balkenende had planned but did not meet with Bulgarian PM Stanishev in Lisbon following "mixed signals" from Sofia. According to de Groot, the Dutch ambassador in Sofia has approached the Bulgarians at both the political and military level, and has received what he described as "ambivalent interest." Per DASD Cagan and Embassy Sofia reporting, the Dutch are aware of our recommendation to pursue Bulgarian help at higher political levels. Yet, given the seemingly lukewarm response received thus far, and following the failed phone call to Norwegian PM Stoltenberg, the Dutch are reluctant to engage their PM without a better sense of where Bulgaria stands. De Groot noted that Dutch CHOD Gen. Berlijn had sent a letter to his Bulgarian counterpart assuring that the Dutch would help with training and equipping issues, and are awaiting a response.

Comment

18. (S) If it pans out, a French contribution of one or two OMLTs to Uruzgan gives the Dutch a credible third partner in Uruzgan, and tips the scales in favor of extending. Yet Dutch interlocutors continue to hold out hope that Norway will agree to contribute a significant force on the ground in Uruzgan. According to van Oosterom, a "package" containing French and Norwegian contributions would have the best chance of winning quick approval in Cabinet and Parliament. The

current timeline calls for a decision by Cabinet in mid-November, with Parliamentary debate most likely concluding 3-4 weeks later. The Dutch will continue to work with the Czechs, Bulgarians and Romanians to provide further pieces to the mission.

Gallagher